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Subject: Men's Ignorance and Helplessness in Prayer.

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OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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MEN'S IGNORANCE

AND

HELPLESSNESS IN PRAYER.

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us [or within us] with groanings which cannot be uttered."—Rom. viii., 26.

There are two ideas of life. One of them may be called the *secular idea.* It respects man as a creature subject to material law —as a creature subject to all the organizations and laws of human society.

Prayer, regarded in the light of this view, is simply supplication for the *things* that men need. Of that kind of prayer it is said that *our Father in heaven knoweth what we have need of, before we ask him.* Still, it is proper to ask. We pray, therefore, for money, and for health, and for strength, and for food, and for raiment, and for success in our enterprises, and for defense against dangers, and for a thousand things that have relation to our earthly life, and to the conditions of prosperity, and all the affairs that are involved in it.

This is the sphere in which most men think of prayer. Most men pray only in the spirit of their lower wants, and of their secular temper.

There is a deeper view, however, in human life. This world is, as it were, a world out of which we are to be born—a womb of time from which is to come forth a new manhood. And in regard to that it is that our text speaks. We do not know what to pray for as we ought where not bodily want, but soul want, or the want of a deeper, nobler manhood, is concerned. There is where prayer is most important, and least breathed, and where less than anywhere else we understand how to pray.

Some examination of man's position in this life will enable you to appreciate how deep this declaration of the apostle draws. And all those persons who think that preaching ought to be a string

Sunday Morning, Mar. 5, 1871. Lesson: Rom VIII., 28-39. Hymns (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 15, 531, 725.

of truisms, or superficial moralities, or *common sense views*, as they are called, I take it for granted have never read the book of Romans; or if they have, that they never touched bottom. It is the profoundest book, I think, of the Bible, and involves more philosophy in the same space than any other. And it is not the less philosophy because it is the philosophy of experience. There are deeper insights in the seventh and eighth of Romans into the condition of man in this life, and into the future state into which he is going, than anywhere else that I know of in an equal compass—I will not say in literature; for there are but few such insights there which have not been derived from the Bible; but inspiration itself, it seems to me, is stronger, and deeper, and clearer, in those chapters of Romans, than anywhere else in the preaching of Paul. And I think it is strictly scientific, and that it will bear the test of the very latest theories and philosophies.

Man is born into this life a double creature. He is an animal complete. There are no animals that roam the woods, or browse through the fields, or fly in the air, there are none of the higher animals, that excel man in the perfect equipment of animalhood. Force, sagacity, cunning, grasping, driving power, grinding power, consuming power—these man has. He has all that is necessary for the maintenance of existence, for support, for defense, for accumulation. Man has a superior endowment of all those energies and passions and engineering forces which belong to the animal. And if he were only an animal, he would get along much better than he does now. Because, although he would get along on a much lower plane, there would not be in him that inconsistence and clashing which now overthrow his plans, vex his life, and destroy his peace, and oftentimes defeat the very end of his existence.

But men, however, are not born into life simply animals: they are born into life with the elements of spiritual manhood as well as the elements of animalhood. Superimposed upon this lower or fleshly nature, as the apostle calls it, is a department of faculties which work directly away from the flesh and from the senses, toward things that are impalpable, invisible, and that can be recognized only by intuition. And it is in this direction that a man is essentially distinguished from the animals that are below him. That which discriminates him from all that is beneath him, is the supersensuous—using the term *sense* according to the scientific, material view.

Here, then, is the animal life in the conditions of this globe; and astride of it sits manhood. As the man rides the horse, so in us there is the manhood that rides the animal, or the beast, or was

meant to. It is oftentimes the case with unlucky riders that the steed throws the rider, and tramps him on the ground; and so it is in this case.

This is the generic statement of the double nature in man. And the Apostle runs that thought through almost every variation of statement. The *flesh* represents, in his terminology, the whole brood of lower faculties, or that part of our nature which constitutes us animals; and the *spirit* represents manhood, or that whole class of faculties by which we are exalted into the higher sphere—by which we become sons of God. In a figurative way, he represents these two as in conflict.

It is as if there were two bands of soldiers quartered in one tenement, having an upper and a lower story. On the ground floor is a company of brawling, drunken, unruly, brutal, violent, cruel men; and in the second story above them, is a company of soldiers that are gentlemanly, and courteous, and humane, and well-disciplined. And there are three states of affairs which may exist. The brawling soldiers below may govern the house; and then they will have hard times up stairs; for their supplies will be cut off, and they will starve. Or, a part of the time the gentlemen up stairs may govern the house, and part of the time the coarse, brutal fellows down stairs may govern it; and then there will be a terrible conflict. And between the attempts of those up stairs to maintain discipline, and the attempts of those below stairs to break down discipline, the place will be a perfect pandemonium. There will be no peace there. They will be quarreling perpetually.

And so the animal nature and the manhood, in man, quarrel. Sometimes it is the lower nature that is in the ascendancy; and then whatever things are above it—conscience, faith, hope, all spiritual tendencies, and all supernal tendencies—are at a discount. The upper part of the mind is starved out because of the absolute ascendency of the appetites and passions—of pride, and selfishness, and envy, and lusts, and all manner of evil feelings.

Then, by and by, there is the second state. The state of resistance and conflict. The spirit wars against the flesh, and refuses to be in subjection to it. And while this war continues, sometimes one predominates and sometimes the other. The men up stairs to-day have the best of it, and the men down stairs to-morrow have the best of it. Nothing is settled; nothing is continuous; all is subject to chance.

There is many a half-formed man who has no fixed habits of life, and in whom sometimes one part of his nature gets momemtum and comes into the ascendency, and sometimes the other part. Some-

times those faculties which are seeking to do good, govern, and sometimes those that are seeking to do evil, govern. And to a greater or less extent there is a state of conflict between the upper and the lower nature, between the manhood and the animal, in every one of us.

Then comes that state in which, by the power of God's spirit, and by the discipline of life, complete ascendency is gained by our supersensuous nature. And all the other parts of our being *are brought into obedience*, as it is said, *to the Lord Jesus Christ.* Or, if you choose to follow out the psychological figure, the superior faculties in our souls assume control. And then there is peace. Then there is rest.

This thought of two men, one of whom is striving to do the thing that is right, and the other of whom is endeavoring to prevent him from doing it, is, in the seventh of Romans, carried out with great ingenuity and particularity. If you undertake to give a literal interpretation to it, you will meet with the same difficulties which are encountered by the commentators; but if you give it a figurative and pictorial rendering, you will still be in the realm of common sense, and will gain some instruction. In the great strife of life it is the ascendency of the lower or animal part, or the ascendancy of the upper or spiritual part, that determines a man's place and character, and for the most part his experience in this life.

Now, since this is the structure of man, and since the aim of human life is the complete development of a new creature stronger than the old man, or the animal man, consider what is the way in which men come into this life, and what is the condition which they sustain to knowledge in this life. And that you may not lose the clue by which I am guiding this discourse, I want to show you how true it is that we know not what to pray for as we ought, and that we do need the spirit of God *to strive and pray within us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* I wish to show that while we do know somewhat what to pray for, so far as our lower needs, the needs of our animal-hood, are concerned, when we come to the higher life, to the superiority of the higher manhood, there it is that we are so ignorant that the Apostle's words have an affecting realization in truth.

Consider, then, since we are by nature without divine illumination and guidance, how ignorant we must be of both the commands, specially and personally, and of the relations of those commands to our education toward manhood.

In the first place, consider how men are born into this world, knowing literally nothing. Every child has to rise from nothing up

to something. There are none that are born with anything more than a great bundle of tendencies, the opening of which, the training of which, the development of which, into partnership and affiliation and habits, is to come afterwards. There is not a soul that, coming into this life, comes knowing anything. We are born as ignorant as are the mollusks, or as the worms that burrow under the turf. Whatever we may come to, it is very certain that we come from the very lowest conceivable point—from zero. Here, lying latent, dormant, are these mighty faculties, both of the lower nature and of the higher; and a man knows no more about them than the hollyhock knows about what is in it. As it lies a seed, a hollyhock could not say, "I shall come forth, and spear up, and have all along my sides these wreaths of beauty." The hollyhock seed does not know what it will be, any more than the morning-glory seed knows what it will be; and the morning-glory seed could not say, "I shall spring up, and creep, and climb, and be covered all over with bells celestial for beauty." The hollyhock seed does not know what is in it; and the morning-glory seed does not know what is in it; and yet they know as much as a child knows, that lies during his first month a palpitating mass of pulp on the mother's knee.

Oh! how beautiful is the child in the mother's eyes, though it is a mere nothing, in its first estate!

And yet, wrapped up in that child, though yet unfolded, are twenty or thirty strong, intense, immeasurable powers. And when the child, little by little, comes to itself, he is, as it were, a chest of tools. And what would you think of a child's being turned by his father, at five years old, into a shop where there was a chest of some forty tools, of which he knew nothing, and of his being told to use them all? He handles them just as it happens, and of course has to suffer for his ignorance. He snatches up one tool, and cuts himself, and throws it down again. He tries another with the same result. And he learns, by and by, not to take a chisel by the wrong end. And he soon finds out that the use of a gimlet is not to pierce his hand. And by his mistakes and mishaps and sufferings, and it may be by an occasional exhortation, he learns to use those tools as they were designed to be used.

Now, a man's head is a chest of tools; and he is born ignorant of them, of their uses, of their power, and of their treatment. Of the whole lore of life he is utterly ignorant, and must be from the nature of things. He is in the same condition, when he comes into life, that a child would be if turned, at five years old, into a mechanics' shop, ignorant of the tools that he found there, and of their uses. The knowledge is to come gradually. The only difference in

the two cases is this: that in tool-life there is no complication whereas in human life there is added hereditary influences. No two men have exactly the same proportion and development of life. All have something of everything; but all do not have it in the same proportion. And yet, management, education, in every particular case, turns on the precise combination of the faculties with which men are endowed. Some men are strong in reason, and are comparatively limited in passion. Other men have an immense passional nature, and have comparatively little reason. Some men gush forth like a mountain full of springs. They are filled with feeling, which jets out at every rift. Some men are as dry as a last year's mullein-stalk. They are said to be *proper*, simply because they stand still, when the reason why they do it is that they do not know how to do anything else. They are never shaken by passions, because they have no passions to be shaken by. They are never overcome by temptation to sin, because there is nothing in them to be tempted. They are sucked dry, as it were, by life or birth.

I am not speaking of the general responsibility of men to law. I am simply speaking of each man's finding his way to his best manhood. Every man has the problem of life to solve; and spirituality in each man has to be evolved by his own expansion. Although that may be helped by many circumstances, although the experience may help much, the special necessity is not taken away of exploring the channels and coast-lines of each man's own conformations. By thought and work shall you come to this knowledge. No man can tell it to you. Neither can it be revealed to you by philosophy. Even experience can do no more than hint it to you. And there is no one that is able to look into you and see just how you are put together, and tell you.

If a man is an expert horologist, he can take a watch, and open it, and see every wheel, and understand what its office is, and how it works, and say, "This wheel has such an escapement," or, "That wheel is balanced in such a way." The variations are few and slight, and easy to be seen. But what teacher, what preacher, what mental philosopher, who on earth, can tell anything about men, but each man for himself? Who can say, "The father has just such a conformation, and the mother has just such a conformation, and the child must have such and such a conformation"? Who can set these things down just as you would set down the terms of a problem in mathematics, with a certainty as to the result, or as you would examine the wheels of a machine, without any doubt as to their relations and functions.

No man can tell this in regard to another. Where a man at-

tempts to explain it, his explanation is a matter of guess. If he has any knowledge in this direction, it is empirical, for the most part. It is a sphere in which philosophy has very little scope, and in which no man finds out anything accurately.

Further, men are born into the world, with the sky above their heads, with climatic influences at work on every side of them, with material laws, on which their life depends, in operation all about them, with the physical globe beneath their feet, on which they are to exercise their powers, which is the hone that sharpens each faculty, which is the source of their supply, which is the shop in which they are to be disciplined, which is the school in which they are to be taught; and yet, how much do they know of this world? They are in it one year, two years; and by that time they begin to find out the difference between fire and that which is not fire. They find out only a few things during the first few years of their life. Meanwhile, that great physical world is acting on them all the time, shaping them, developing them, leading them out and forth. And it is late in life, comparatively, before they have any considerable knowledge of the conditions of the material globe, which has all the time a superimposed power and influence upon them.

Still further, men come into a society which is already cut out and prepared before they enter it, and which most powerfully affects them, stimulating their passions and appetites, drawing out their affections, winning their confidence, bewitching their imagination, and touching their sentient, emotional being on every side. Men are born into a society which they did not form, which is not interpreted to them, and which most of them pass through life without materially understanding, except in a mechanical way. Men, endowed with so many faculties of the nature of which they are ignorant, and born into a material world of which they know nothing, and which is powerfully influencing them, are ushered into a society the ten thousand influences of which are warping them, biasing them, stimulating them, and drawing them hither and thither. And yet they are ignorant of that society, and of its social relations.

Men are born into the necessity of conducting business, that, like mighty rivers, has its channels and its currents, and is apt to sweep men down stream, making it almost impossible for them to cross it, or to go up stream.

These are facts. They are facts which cannot be gainsaid. They are facts which will impress you more and more as you study them. The student of human nature, and especially the preacher, who undertakes to trace and follow out the influences which are in operation among men, cannot help seeing that they are facts. And so far from having exaggerated them, I have understated them.

Consider, then, how impossible, under such circumstances, it will be for a man to find his own way to manhood. When it is said, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him," men sometimes think it is a very hard saying; but is it not a saying of the truth? When you come to think how men are born, how weak they are, and what influences are around about them, you might as well set a little child five years old on the shore of the Pacific ocean, and say to it, "Find your way across the plains, across the mountains, across the streams, across the morasses, across everything that intervenes, to the Atlantic ocean," as to tell a man in this world to find his way through all the intricacies of life to his true manhood. Could that child find its way except there were some one to take it in his arms, and lead it, and encourage its little footsteps? Would it not perish in the great wilderness before reaching the place for which it set out?

And in human life, proud as men are, and vain as they become, by their knowledge and intelligence spanning rivers with bridges that are wonderful, boring mountains, which is strange as compared with past ignorance, doing things in matter which set them up in conceit of themselves, the great question that concerns every man is, "How shall I develop manhood in myself?" That is a question about which human knowledge is very limited, about which every man is sadly ignorant, and which no man has in himself the power to explain.

And here comes in the doctrine of the Divine Spirit, of the influence of the Holy Ghost—that enlightening, teaching, guiding influence by which men are lifted up above the lower conditions of their life; by which there is a path laid, into which their feet are guided, though they themselves may know it not.

Consider, again, the case of those who have truly entered into this new life, which is ministered by the Spirit of God to men. I have said that the natural man is not able to discern the things of the Spirit. I have said that such are the circumstances and such are the facts of his existence, that a man, without the influence of the Holy Spirit will never find his way up from the animal spheres of life into a true spiritual manhood in Christ Jesus. But, consider, when a man has begun, under the influence of the Divine Spirit to live this higher life, how dense the darkness still is, and how profound is the ignorance still, which hang around him, and make it necessary that there should be some help from above. How ignorant are men of the special methods of treating their own faculties. We generally go by empirical rules—very seldom by philosophical principles.

A man is very quick-tempered. He hopes he is converted. He joins the church. He goes back to his household a better man. He knows very well that one of his besetting sins is that inflammatory, explosive temper of his. He wishes to overcome that temper. He is a man that makes a great deal too much blood. He is a man whose nerves are rendered supersensitive by the overcharging of his system.

Now, there are two instructors that would come to such a man—his moral instructor, and his physical instructor. His physician would say to him, "Sir, you are a person who should never indulge in the stimulation of meats. Already you are overcharged with blood, and your brain is undergoing a process of unwholesome stimulation; and what you call temper is oftentimes the cry of nature in distress. Reduce your diet. Bring your body into a cooler and calmer state."

Then comes the moral instructor. He says, "The way to overcome your temper is to bring it under the dominion of some faculty that is stronger than it." The man does not need to deal with his temper so much as to take the antagonist of that temper and give it a controlling power. What he wants is to bring into ascendency that part of the mind which shall forestall the action of his temper.

But what does many a man do who has not the benefit of these instructors? He prays that he may be delivered from temper. That is very good as far as it goes; but if I take a penknife and pray that when I draw it across my finger it shall not cut, I do not think that there will be any answer to my prayer. If a man who is irritable from over-feeding, prays before breakfast that God will take care of his temper, and then fills himself full at breakfast, I do not think that he will have an answer to his prayer. If a man who is accustomed to the use of intoxicating drinks, prays that he may be kept cool and calm all day, and then takes down a glass of liquor, I do not think that his prayer will be answered. Here are physical and psychological conditions on which temper is excited or allayed; and though prayer is good, knowledge ought to be at the bottom of every prayer. Yet, how many who wish to lead a Christian life, and whose temper stands in their way, undertake to overcome it by methods which are neither founded upon knowledge nor upon good judgment! How many there are who attempt to control their temper by watching it! And what can a man accomplish by watching his temper? He has so much to do that he cannot think about it day by day, and all the time; and he can only now and then turn his attention to it. Watching a man's temper is like watching fire-crackers when mischievous boys are touching them off. While you are looking at one

here, another goes off there; and while you are looking at that there, another goes off yonder.

A man goes into the world, and there are those little slow-matches leading out from him; and circumstances touch them off right and left; and when he is watching his temper on one side, it goes off on the other side; and he gets discouraged, finally, and says, "I do not know, but it seems to me as though I were not a Christian, and as though God does not mean that I shall be one. I have made the utmost struggle for five years, and I do not see that, after all my endeavors during that time, I am one bit nearer to gentleness and meekness and patience than I was before." But at last the man is sixty, or seventy, or seventy-five years of age, and the machinery of his body is much worn, and that supply which feeds the appetites and passions is greatly diminished, and his once fiery temper has become cooled down, because he feels the breath of the other world coming upon him; and he begins to think that a great triumph of grace has been wrought in him. And other people say, "What a great change has come over him! How sweet he has become! How calm he is!" Why should he not be, now that he is nearly worn out?

The wheel of a mill, not being oiled, groans and creaks, groans and creaks, all night long; and there are two ways of curing it. One is to pour oil on it; and the other is to stop it, and let it stand still.

There is an oil of grace that will enable a man to cure the infirmity of temper, if he knows how to take it and pour it on. That may be employed; or the infirmity of temper may be cured by stopping the wheels of life and letting them stand still. Many of our graces, late sown and late reaped, are nothing but decadencies. They are the working out of that which in the midst of our vitality and vigor gave us so much trouble. But how much do men know of this when they undertake to cultivate graces? While they are dealing with generic things they do not have much trouble; but when they come to things specific they are in perplexity. A man says, "How shall I have faith? You speak of imagination; and you speak of rapture of emotion. Now, I am calmer and cooler than you are. And I know visible qualities. But how shall I have faith to discern things which are invisible? How shall I have an imagination that shall flash things out into the pathless air as your's does?" I cannot instruct you how. I do not know of any man that can instruct you how. A man says, "I am naturally doubting and fearing; I am naturally skeptical; I am naturally reluctant to give assent to anything that is not proved. Will you tell me how to become childlike and confiding?" I could say, "Pray for that which you desire." I could say, "Seek it through Divine guidance." But what instruction would

that be? What philosophic direction, what working pattern would I give him in that advice? How many good men, how many conscientious men, how many godly men, know enough of the mind to change one mood into another, and take that and exalt it above all others, and so control the lower elements of the mind by the higher?

How little do men know what is the matter with them! And if they knew what was the matter, they would not be as well off as the doctors are now. There are certain classes of diseases that doctors can cure. There are certain other classes that they can cure sometimes. And there are certain other classes—those that are the most intricate—which the doctor knows about only when the man is dead, and he opens him and sees what has killed him. And how much more obscure are these internal facts of psychology! The sicknesses of the soul are beyond the knowledge of any of us. We do not understand even the lowest forms of them. We are all of us quacks. And there is more significance in the term "foolishness of preaching," than men—especially ministers—are apt to think. There is a vast deal of moralizing and instruction on this subject; but how little of it comes home, so that a man feels, "That meets my case; that solves my difficulty; that shows me what my necessity is: now I know what my tendencies are, and I can act accordingly"? How many can furnish themselves with light on such matters, or can find anybody that can furnish it for them?

Still more, how ignorant are we of the relations of daily experience to our spiritual good! We are all of us under the impulse of great natural affections which are stimulating us to industry and enterprise. One man is pursuing success in one direction, and another man in another direction. Human society is a great room, a vast workshop, where all lawful industry is carried on. Business is a means of grace designed to wake up man's understanding and ingenuity and patience and hope, and to bring out power in the whole inward man. But in seeking these things which are, in a general way, a moral education, one man is overwhelmed with difficulties. He is discouraged He is beaten down. He is driven hither and thither upon misfortunes and disasters, as a ship is driven upon the shore by winds.

No man finds prosperity abounding. And how many can form any estimate as to whether it is best for them to be prosperous or not?

If I should consult the wheat that is growing in Spring in the field as to what was best for it, the wheat would say, "Let me alone. Let the rain feed me. Let the winds gently strengthen me. Let me grow to my full height and size." But ah! the land on which

that wheat is sown is over-rich; and if the wheat grows to its full height and size, it will be so fat and heavy that it will break and fall down, and be lost. So the farmer turns in his cattle, and they browse the wheat. They eat it down to the ground. And by and by, later, when it is allowed to grow, it has been so weakened by this cruel pasturage that it will not become so rank as to break down, but will stand erect, and carry its heads up, and ripen its grain.

Many men will bear browsing. They get too fat, and cannot carry themselves upright and firm, and they break and fall down; and the best part of them lies in the dirt; and all that stands up is straw and stubble.

There is another field where the wheat, if I were to say to it, "What is best for you?" perhaps, hearing my discourse on the other field, might say, from an amiable motive, "Let me alone." But ah! that happens to be a field where the soil is poor, and where it has been poorly tilled, and where, if the prayer of the wheat should be heeded, and it should be let alone, it would not have strength enough to grow, and would only have a starveling life, and would bear no harvest. So the farmer says, "Give it ample top-dressing. Bring in your guano." Here is a field that has need of strength to enable it to carry its crop on to ripeness and perfection. Here there is no danger of the crop growing rank, and falling down, and leaving nothing but straw.

And so it is with men. But who knows what is best for him? Some men can endure prosperity, and some cannot; but who can discriminate between them?

It is said that there are men who will take a stick in their hand and go over a piece of ground and tell where a well ought to be dug, because the stick is drawn toward the appropriate place—(you can believe this if you have a mind to). The stick, it seems, knows more than the men do, and by turning over, indicates the appointed spot. But it sometimes hits, and sometimes misses. There are, however, some places where the ground is full of springs, so that wherever the stick goes, it never misses.

But there are no such necromancers of the soil of the soul. No man can tell where God's well of salvation is to be dug in him; and almost every man tries to shield and cover up that flood from whence God will bring out the water of the soul.

When God comes to one man, and emptics his coffers, he cries out, "O Lord! not here, not here. Dig not thy well here. Here is where my gold, my treasure, is. This is my life!" But still, down goes the pick; down goes the drill. Where he needed it most, and where he wanted it least, there God digs.

Another man says, "If God had taken all I had, I would not have cared much about that. If it had only been my houses and lands, I should have been content. But it was my cradle!" Oh! yes, that was just where God knew that the well of salvation ought to be sunk; and there he dug; and he made the man deeper and richer.

Says another man, "Oh! if God had only taken him in the cradle! But he kept him alive; and he has been a drunkard; and he has laid upon me heavier than mountains. I would that he had spared me the pain of carrying this sorrow all my life long." How little you know what is for your good. God knows where to strike, that he may open in you "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Who knows, but God? Who can form an estimate for himself? Who for his children? Who for his best beloved?

When you have lived twenty years, and thirty years, and forty years, and fifty years, and, as I have, nearly sixty years, and find that then you do not know any better about these things than you did when you began your career, you will exclaim, "How strange this is!"

What a thing human life is! What a mystery man is! How wonderful is the way in which he is thrust into life! How marvelous is the blundering way in which he gropes through life, like a man in an unknown room, awakened from sleep suddenly in the night, stumbling over everything, and finding out by his accidents what he learns.

Now, then, let us read and see if there is not something in this text:

"Likewise the Spirit [God's great luminous Spirit] also helpeth our infirmities."

Oh! in that word *infirmities*, how large a part of human life is included! How much of what men call faults, how much of what men call sins, and how much, also, of what men call crimes and vices, will God, in the greatness of his love and mercy, call infirmities.

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought."

"Yes, I do," says one. "I pray for clothes; and I pray for bread. Christ told me to; and I say, 'Give us this day our daily bread.'" Ah! but that is low-down prayer. That is the animal crying out for animal wants. And when you come to the higher thought (for Paul had been running a parallel between the animal and the man, between the flesh and the spirit); when you come to the other view of the subject, you have the revelation that the lower nature does not know how to pray for the supernal manhood; that it does not know what

things to add nor what things to take away; that it does not know whether to pray for more or for less, for the higher or for the lower, for this, that, or the other training. It does not know what to ask for as it ought.

Now comes the remainder:

"But the Spirit itself maketh intercession in us [*for us*, it is here; but the force of it in the original is *in us*, or *through us*] with groanings which cannot be uttered."

What are we to understand by that? I understand this: that there is a divine influence which is moving upon men, and which is developing itself in the form of yearnings, and of vague aspirations, and of spiritual longings, for which we can have no expression; and that these yearnings and longings are the product of God's spirit in us, dwelling in us, stimulating us, exciting us. This is the evidence of his presence, that there is that vital longing, that incessant yearning, for something higher and better, "with groanings which cannot be uttered," with soul moanings—the most affecting of all things.

There is nothing that touches one more than a moan that does not want to moan. The shrieks and implorations of suffering wildly uttered, the outcries of suffering that might, perhaps, be bravely borne, shock us, but do not touch us affectingly. But when you see a reserve of self-control, or when one thinks himself out from under observation, and you hear him utter a suppressed sigh that in another would resound out into the proportions of a moan; or when you hear one that is asleep moan; or when you see a little child that with the faintest cry catches its breath, then you are deeply affected. What mother does not run to the cradle, and what mother's tone does not show how quick she is touched by the mystery of life that is going on in the child, when she hears it sobbing in its sleep! "What ails the darling? What is it dreaming of?"

The mother looks upon the child, under such circumstances, very much as God looks on mankind, whom he sees groping and striving, and coming no nearer to finding the way than men in the woods do, who have no guide, who know not the road, to whom no house is visible, and who have nothing by which to direct their course. God sees men struggling, and hears them groaning toward the great hereafter, ignorant of how to control the forces that are around about them so as to secure what is best for them. And it is God's Spirit dwelling in such men that sets them to longing and yearning. And all those longings and yearnings in men, which cannot voice themselves, which cannot form themselves into confessions or supplications, God knows how to answer. And he knows how to guide men so that the feelings which they do not know how to express, shall be efficacious though unexpressed.

Here, so far as the unfolding of the text is concerned, we stay.

I remark, in the first place, in view of this statement, that if this welling up of the innermost nature is praying, if this desiring and yearning of the soul is true prayer, if that is the best praying which has the fewest words, which has the most longing, which has the deepest feeling and the least vocalization, it is a matter of fact that very few pray out of their manhood, and very many pray out of their animal-hood. Think of the things that you ask for, think of the things that you desire, analyze your prayers, and you will see that this is so. When you are alarmed, you pray; when something threatens you, you pray. When your prosperity slackens, you pray. When danger impends, you pray. When pain begins to shoot through you fiery signals of approaching dissolution, you pray. When your child is sick, you pray. When trouble comes into your household, you pray. When you have borne your burdens as long as you can, you begin to pray. Your lower life prays. There would be no harm in that if it were only the bass, as it were, to the melody of prayer above. But how few there are who actually pray out of their higher reason, out of their faith, out of their hope, out of their conscience, out of their love, out of their whole supernal nature! How few pray with such intensity that, aside from the general yearnings inspired by the spirit of God, they are filled with the Holy Ghost! How few there are whose hearts yearn toward men, toward heaven and toward God, so that they are caught up by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and led to the fulfillment of their prayers!

Brethren, our prayers are very low, very sordid, very secular. They are of the earth, earthy. And there are those who have complained that their life of prayer was limited. There are those who have felt and said that they could not utter prayers. Prayers precomposed for them were like ready-made garments that did not fit; and the prayers ordinarily uttered seem to them still less profitable. But they say, "While I work, my heart goes out in prayer. I hardly know what I pray for; but my heart communes heavenward." And others say, "When I walk in the fields, I pray; and such praying is the only prayer that I know. The moment I kneel down, and the formality of prayer is imposed upon me, I lose the spirit of prayer." And people say to them, "There is something wrong about you. If you were right, the moment it was twelve, at noon, you would feel prayer struck out of you, as the hours are struck off by a clock, and you would go down on your knees, and open your lips, and pray." That may be easy for some folks, but it is not possible for me. I never could pray so. Clock-work is very good in its place,

but I do not think that the heart and the affections were made to go by clock-work.

If when I go home my heart is toward my household, I can express feeling toward them; but if I come home wearied, or clouded, or obscured and bondaged by other thoughts, I cannot, simply because I have gone home, open like a flower and exhale the fragrance of affection in the family. My feelings of affection do not flow, simply because I come to the spot and the time. There is a mood as well as an hour, which has to do with prayer.

There are those who say, "I cannot, even when I am moved by the Spirit of God, utter prayer. My prayer is prayer of thought and feeling." Do not look askance upon them, as though that were no prayer. They do pray; and oftentimes that is the deepest and the most Divinely inspired prayer. At any rate, while I would not dissuade you from praying regularly, at set times of devotion, nor from uttering prayer if occasion serve, I would say: Preserve, as a part, and as the most precious part, of your religious experience, those yearnings and aspirations which have no words. Do you walk in the fields, and, looking up to the heavens, do you feel that something is lifting you toward a higher sphere? It is God that is drawing you upward. There is not a tendency of the soul to go above the flesh and the appetites and to lift you to a higher life, that is not of God. Every impulse of this kind shows that the Spirit is speaking in you and with you. Therefore, yield to it. Let it gush forth.

I remark once more, that nothing so impresses me with the necessity of prayer, and nothing so comforts me, as the conviction of the reality that there is a great heart above us, doing for men more than they do for themselves, and more than they can recognize as being done for them. When I see how men live, when I see how ignorant they are, when I see how, as I have attempted faintly to delineate, they wander upon unknown ways, I wonder that anybody is saved; I wonder that there is any goodness in life. But I do not wonder when I think that in the divine Providence there is a Heart that sits like a mother in the household.

Here are children—five, six, seven. They are surrounded by a thousand implements of mischief. The circumstances are such as tend to lead them into mischief. They, all of them, are filled with selfishness and pride and vanity, and other feelings of the lower nature, which are ready to explode at the slightest touch. At the merest provocation they would naturally get angry and snatch and scratch and quarrel. And yet, all day long there is harmony in that little band. Who chords it? What keeps those children in a

peaceful and happy state of mind from morning till night? They do not know it, but it is the forethought of the mother. It is the touching of this one's disposition, and that one's disposition, first on this side and then on that, it is the wise administration of love in the household, which keeps everything moving harmoniously. The children do not know how to take care of themselves; and there are many little temptations to wrangle with each other, but there sits the mother, who, without any apparent show of superiority, governs them in their play. There is an atmosphere thrown off from the mother's heart which keeps the whole household in order; and all progresses regularly and happily.

Just so God presides among men. In the household of faith his great father-heart pours out love that fills and stains the atmosphere more than the sun stains royally the clouds. He thinks for us in such a manner that he is able to say, "All things shall work together for good to them that love me." He thinks for us more wisely than we can think for ourselves.

And he lifts us up into that higher realm in which we rejoice that he thinks for others as well as for us. I think I should die, almost, if I did not feel, "It is not me alone that God thinks for." I believe there is a Heart that presides over the ages. I believe that God administers for the human race. And although, when I look out upon the darkness of the outspread family of man, and see how ignorant and helpless men are, through the many successive gradations, all the way up to where the light plays on the dome of Christian faith, it is enough to sink my hope in the depths of the sea, yet I find rest in God. I find rest in believing that there is a divine love which guides the race and the world. I find rest in that which mere philosophers never knew, and which cannot be found out by any empirical process of living—namely, that the heart of God guides everything; that he will subdue everything to himself; that *every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord to the glory of God.* Blessed truth! Pluck from me the thought of a Father God, and of a loving Heart that carries power, and that knows how by pain and joy alike to build up, chastise and guide; take me away from that central thought, and the whole world would collapse, and there would be no more comfort in life for me. I would go in despair to them that dig graves, and say, "Hide me; for life is too heavy, and its clouds are too murky, and its sorrows are too many." But if God lives, and his name is love, and his government is infinite, and I may believe that out of darkness he will bring light, and that all things at last shall praise him, then I will yet with cheer carry forward my labor, and will bear my burdens with-

out complaint. For I shall know that however dark the cloud may be, behind it is light. *Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.*

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Our Heavenly Father, we rejoice that thou knowest what we have need of—food and raiment and shelter; all providential mercies. The necessities which spring from our outward life are before thee; and thou hast ordained the forces of nature; and they are fulfilling thy will perpetually. There is light for the eye, and sound for the ear, and breath for the life; and all the sources of men's prosperous life are at hand; and we flourish in body, and are made continually rich and happy by thy goodness to us. But how shall we be fed with that other bread? How shall we live in that deeper life? How shall we know what we need there? How shall we ask acceptably except by the inbreathing of thy spirit. Guide, then, by the Holy Spirit, our thoughts and our feelings, and give expression to those nameless desires which rise so often within us. And we beseech of thee, O Lord our God! that we may know how to aspire upward, by thy blessed Spirit, toward all things which are pure, and all things which are excellent, and all things which are in symmetry, and all things which are like to thee, and which shall bring thee into accord with us.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that same compassion upon us which thou hast in our vain and aimless struggle, in all useless suffering, and in all that chastisement of suffering which is made needful by our vagrancy. In our mistake and our sin, still deal with us tenderly. In infinite patience thou hast dealt with the world; and if it is to be saved, it must needs be by that same patience still unrolled; still carrying forward the race in the midst of blindness and ignorance and helplessness.

O Lord! our help is from thee. From thee come life and light. From thee comes power. From thee come all motive and instruction. And we look to thee for that inward light and guidance by which alone we shall ever become the sons of God.

We thank thee that there are so many who have begun this life; and though none have it yet royally within them, we thank thee that there are so many who begin to know something of the spirit of adoption; who are able to draw near to thee with humble boldness; who live in the consciousness of thy sympathy for them; who are able from day to day to cast their care upon thee; who are able from day to day to live in the spirit of children that trust and love. And we thank thee that there are so many added to them from time to time. Increase the number, we beseech of thee, of those that are in spirit and temper, in life and character, sons of God.

And we pray that thou wilt make the truth powerful upon the hearts of all. May those that are living in a low estate, far from God, and in outward righteousness, be greatly quickened; and may their desires be deepened, and their life lifted up to a higher and nobler plane.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that the truth, to-night, may reach the hearts of those who are not followers of the Lord; who seek their own way; who fulfill the lusts of the flesh; who live for the pride of the eye and the vanity of the heart—for transient things; things that perish in the using; things that cannot go with them further than the grave, and that

must be left behind when their freed spirits go forth into the eternity of their existence. Grant that there may be very serious thoughts by serious minds here to-night. Grant that many may be quickened to ask for their own souls' welfare, and to know how it fares with them. And since thou art sitting upon the mediatorial throne; since thou art merciful and forgiving, may none be unwilling to confess their sin. May every one be willing to know the thing that is within him—the evil heart of unbelief, the enmity of the flesh and of the spirit, to the Son of God. And we beseech of thee that there may be heart-searchings and turnings, on the part of those who now are in darkness and wind and fire and flood, from those devouring elements.

We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all those who labor in our midst, and those who go forth among the poor and needy, to do the works of Christ upon their hearts. More and more accompany them. And grant, we pray thee, that the light of thy countenance and of love may win many and many to the knowledge of that Source of love whom we worship.

We pray that thou wilt bless all thy churches of every name. Unite them together more and more in a true divine spirit. And may the things which divide us seem of less and less account, and the things which unite us become more and more important in our estimation. And at last may there be harmony throughout the whole world. And may the church set the example in this great work of harmonization. And we pray that there may be a time when there shall not be warrings among thy people, nor among nations; when ignorance shall be chased away by knowledge; when the true faith shall take the place of superstition; when all power shall be in rightful hands; when all men shall be too just to oppress, and when all men shall be too strong to be oppressed, and when all the earth shall be filled with gladness and purity and peace. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be praises everlasting. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou will bless the word which has been spoken; and grant that it may arouse in us a more earnest desire to be led of God. May we not seek to shield our hearts from the light that is shining from within. May we desire, above all things, to be the children of the Spirit. May we learn not to lean upon pride, nor to trust in our conceit. May we learn to lean upon thee. Without thee we can do nothing; we are orphans, fatherless. Lord Jesus, lead us to the Father. Holy Spirit, open our understanding, and our inward life and light, and bring us to that supernal manhood, by which we shall be called rightfully the children of God. Lead us while we live; appoint our way; apportion our burdens and our discipline. O, stand thou Beloved One, and look forth upon us from the Heavenly gate, clearer than the pearl, brighter than the golden street, sweeter than all the voices that call, saying, Come. Thou art to us, O, Saviour of the soul! the Knowing that guides the unknowing. Stand thou waiting for us till our time shall come, till thy heart needs us; then send the welcome messenger and call thy children home. And in thy presence, when we shall see thee as thou art, and know as we are known, we will cast our crowns at thy feet, saying "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory, forever and ever." *Amen.*

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